

# An Old Tradition and a New Beginning: The Evolution of Freshman Orientation at Saint Vincent College

by Rev. Rene Kollar, O.S.B.

Saint Vincent College in Latrobe admitted its first class of women in 1983, and in August 2008 the faculty, staff, and administration gathered in the gymnasium of the Robert S. Carey Center on the campus to acknowledge the 25th anniversary of co-education at Saint Vincent. This marked the most significant change in the history of the college, but there were other alterations in campus life, although not as important as the admission of women. The manner in which freshmen were introduced to college life also underwent some changes.

Founded in 1846 by the German monk Boniface Wimmer, Saint Vincent College had trained generations of male students. Within this masculine environment, certain traditions and customs became established which reflected the character of the student body and the sense of masculine fellowship. Some did not last long, but others survived. Freshmen on most college and university campuses endured a ritual of welcome commonly known as "hazing," but because of abuses this questionable ceremony of initiation has been either banned or closely regulated at American institutions of higher education. At Saint Vincent College, this practice was known as "Rules." With the support of the college administration, the student government oversaw this attempt to integrate the new students into the general population. The wearing of name tags which also identified the student's hometown, funny hats ("dinks"), and a long list of "Rules" regulated the life of the new freshmen. Some of these regulations might even appear to mirror the juvenile activities of the movie *Animal House*, but there were positive aspects of this practice such as social events with other colleges and trips to Pittsburgh for baseball games. One individual, a senior in 1965, recalls that the "goal was to give the new students a taste of the campus and contact with upperclassmen who took care to help freshmen navigate this new world."

Today students at Saint Vincent are introduced to the college life through a process called Freshman Orientation. The new student at Saint Vincent College begins his/her initiation into collegiate life during the summer before classes begin, and the program continues throughout the first semester. These students learn about social activities, academics, support systems, academic policies, and school regulations through meetings with college officials and the older students. They are introduced to members of the college administration, faculty of their academic department, and upperclassmen who serve as mentors. Moreover, on their first weekend on campus, today's Saint Vincent students also take part in community service activities which introduce them to the Benedictine value of helping others.

The current practice of Freshman Orientation, consequently, stands in stark contrast with the custom of "Freshman Rules" which had been designed for the insular and all-male environment of Saint Vincent College. These "Rules" had been modified throughout the twentieth century and eventually discontinued after the fall of 1965 when the faculty began to voice concern over the appropriateness of some of the practices, to which they attributed a "barracks mentality." The last student chairman when "Rules" still governed the initiation into college life successfully recommended to the college administration that

hazing and "Rules" be discontinued because of faculty opposition and changing societal attitudes toward such practices. But memories of this experience are still the subject of lively discussions when alumni gather to reminisce.

Saint Vincent Freshman Rules of 1937, 1941, and 1952, which are reprinted below, might today provoke laughter and disbelief. American colleges and universities had similar initiation rites and practices for incoming students which have also been modified, and times have also changed at Saint Vincent College. During the 1960s, for example, the word *Orientation* replaced the more severe term *Rules* as the description of the program which introduced the freshmen to college life. The traditions of the past, however, provide an interesting insight into college life at Saint Vincent during that period of its history when "Freshmen Rules" were an integral part of introduction to collegiate life at Latrobe.




Fall 1965: Last year of "Rules" at St. Vincent's College.

Courtesy: St. Vincent College Archives, Latrobe, PA.

# An Old Tradition and a New Beginning: The Evolution of Freshman Orientation at Saint Vincent College (continued)

1937

**THE VINCENTIAN**



ST. VINCENT COLLEGE—LATROBE, PA.  
1937

**Freshmen Rules**

Freshmen must always show themselves obedient and respectful to the officials of the Institution and to the members of the Faculty.

Freshmen shall keep their hands out of their pockets at all times.

Freshmen are not permitted to loiter at the College entrance, the archways, the Triangle, the Crossroads, the Bridge, the benches along the third base line on the ball field, or at the intersection of Main and Ligonier Streets in Latrobe.

Freshmen shall at all times keep to the paths and off the grass, except when engaged in an athletic contest.

All Freshmen, whether boarders or day students, are required to wear "Dinks," black socks or golf hose, and black ties at all times, at the College, at Latrobe and Greensburg, as well as on their way to and from the College.

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Freshmen shall not wear athletic, society or class insignia from preparatory schools.

Freshmen shall not wear any initials, monogram, or insignia of any other college or university.

The wearing of any jewelry (ring, pin, emblem, watch fob or charm), except a watch, is forbidden to Freshmen.

Freshmen shall commit to memory all school songs, yells, and the Freshmen Rules; further, they must be ready to render them at any time at the request of higher class members.

Freshmen shall attend, in a body, all the mass meetings, pep meetings, and athletic contests on the home grounds.

Freshmen shall show the proper respect to all members of the higher classes:

1. They shall knock and receive an invitation to enter, before entering a room.
2. They shall stand in their places until all others have left the refectory, the chapel, the assembly, etc.
3. They shall greet their superiors at all times.


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Freshmen are required to carry matches and to furnish same to members of the three upper classes upon request.

Freshmen shall not hail, request, or accept rides any time or on any highway.


The following rules govern the conduct of Freshmen while in Latrobe:

1. They will not appear on the streets of Latrobe in the company of any woman or women, except it be a member of their immediate family.
2. While at the theatre in Latrobe, they will sit in the balcony back of the cross aisle.



1952

**STUDENT HANDBOOK**



ST. VINCENT COLLEGE  
1952  
Latrobe, Pennsylvania

**FRESHMEN RULES**  
1952 - 1953

To all Freshmen:

The following rules will go into effect 8:00 A.M. Wednesday, September 17, and continue for 4 weeks. A demerit will be issued for each offense by members of the Freshmen Rules Committee and penalties will be issued for these by upper-classes at the tribunals. Five demerits will make a Freshman ineligible to hold office in his Freshman year. Any Freshman not taking rules unless excused by the college administration will be barred from holding office in any campus club, class, or organization during his entire stay at St. Vincent College.

**RULES:**


1. The following will be carried or worn at all times by all Freshmen:
  - A. A 10" by 12" sign on the back with full name, nickname, hometown and course of study.
  - B. The Freshman dink, worn flat on top of the head.
  - C. Kelly green tie, worn flush against the neck, no open collar.
  - D. Solid yellow socks, pant legs rolled up 2" above the socks.
  - E. A class schedule.

STUDENT HANDBOOK

- F. A penny box of matches to be used for lighting cigarettes for upper-classes.
- G. No T-shirts or jeans to be worn unless given written permission by members of Freshmen Rules Committee.
- H. No monogram jerseys, sweaters, nor jewelry.
2. A Freshman will comply immediately with the requests of an upper-classes. He will address him as "Sir."
3. Freshmen are not to loiter under the archways nor in the "Shack." They are not to go through the monastery on their way to chapel or church.
4. All Freshmen will commit to memory the "Alma Mater," the Vincent "Fight Song," all college cheers. These "Freshmen Rules" must also be memorized and recited at the request of upper-classes.
5. Upper-classes have the preference over freshmen while "thumping" and when entering the dining halls.
6. No freshman may leave the campus during the period of "Freshmen Rules" unless given a written excuse by the Dean of Men.
7. All resident Freshmen must be in their rooms from 8:00 P.M. to 12:00 P.M. when there is class the next day. They are permitted to go to the "Shack" between 10:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M.

1941

ST. VINCENT COLLEGE  
LATROBE, PENNA.



STUDENT HANDBOOK  
1941

**FRESHMEN RULES**

A committee of upper classesmen see to the enforcement of the Freshmen Rules from the opening of the school year until such a time as the Student Government sees fit to abrogate the Rules for the Freshmen of that year.

Freshmen must always show themselves obedient and respectful to the officials of the Institution and to the members of the Faculty.

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Student Handbook

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St. Vincent College

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